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East Timor :
Governor's remarks "appalling"

Two weeks before the first anniversary of the November 12 Dili massacre, the new Governor of East Timor, Abilio Jose Osorio Soares, expressed his view that even more protestors should have died. Quoted in the October 29 edition of Forum Keadilan [Justice Forum]), a new fortnightly Indonesian legal affairs magazine, Mr. Soares said Indonesian troops should have killed "even more" pro-independence demonstrators in the November 12 shooting last year.

He also reported the death toll in the massacre was 200 -- four times the official Indonesian figure. "As far as I'm concerned, I think even more should have died," Mr Soares told the magazine.

(In fact, an eight-month study by church groups, students and rebels in East Timor has uncovered the real number of dead and missing as 273 civilians killed, 355 missing and 376 wounded.)

Mr Soares, an uncompromising opponent of the East Timorese independence movement with close links to hardline elements of the Indonesian military, was appointed governor in September.

Stung by the outrage at Osorio's remark in the interview, Jakarta apparently felt it had to act fast to defuse the row, so its new appointee to head the 'civil' administration in East Timor has been forced to deny his words. He suggests there was a 'misinterpretation' in the interview, but his words in Indonesian hardly leave scope for this.

One week later, Indonesia's military chief, Try Sutrisno accused the West of distorted vision in its criticism of last year's massacre in East Timor and pledged to continue to deal firmly with those who disturb the peace. "The West view us through coloured glasses," Try claimed after launching Indonesia's biggest-ever military exercises in the eastern coastal city of Surabaya.The exercises end on Nov. 12, but Try denied there was any connection between the anniversary and the exericses. He also said Indonesia would not suffer from the US decision last month to cut $2.4 million in aid for military training because of events in East Timor. "I don't care about that. There are many alternatives." He said Indonesia would continue to deal firmly with those who broke the peace in separatist-prone regions like East Timor.

"But the situation is getting better and better in East Timor. We are building bridges, roads, and teaching the people simple technology," Try said, referring to the "territorial operations" the military had undertaken. He denied reports that he had said Indonesia's dissidents would be wiped out, also claiming to have been misquoted.

Two weeks earlier, Indonesia's defence minister said

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Timor : the situation inside has deteriorated

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the West should stop its impolite meddling in the internal affairs of developing countries and realise there is no perfect system of government. Benny Murdani was quoted in the *Jakarta Post* as telling a two-day meeting of Indonesian military leaders that the West should pay more attention to the virtue of politeness (!)

Murdani accused the international media of fanning negative opinions about the Indonesian political system and of gossiping about the armed forces role in politics. He said that the West's biased information system would not let the issue of East Timor rest.

But the situation inside East Timor is not getting better, as Sutrisno claims, and it is hard to be 'polite', as Murdani would like, when reports suggest that the human rights situation has deteriorated even further.

Recent reports from East Timor residents in Darwin indicate an increase in activity by security forces in East Timor and a culture of fear is said to pervade the East Timorese community. People who have always held concerns for friends and relatives are openly expressing fear as reports filter through of many people being arrested and others 'disappearing'.

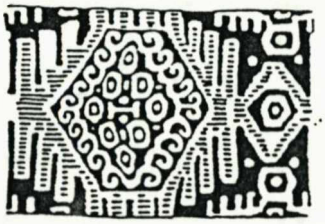
Just one recent incident in Baucau is a chilling reminder of the realities. According to the Indonesian military, a young East Timorese was shot and fatally wounded on the evening of 5 October. The killing occurred after a soldier of battalion 315 had been killed (apparently during a brawl) in Baucau. The army claimed that the person they killed was a guerrilla who had slipped into Baucau while a Development Exhibition was being held. The security forces also arrested several dozen people.

In fact, what had actually happened was that an incident started with a fight between members of ABRI, apparently over a woman. One (or some) members of ABRI were killed in the brawl. The brawl occurred outside the office of the Baucau Bupati where an exhibition on development had just come to a close.

To conceal the reason for their own casualties, ABRI turned on some Timorese who had been attending the exhibition and seriously injured Dominggus Aikarak. Aikarak's brother, Saturnino de Costa Belo, is one of the 8 Timorese who was tried in East Timor earlier this year; he was sentenced to nine years. Saturnino was tried in Baucau; all the others were tried in Dili.

Badly injured, Aikarak made his way to the General Hospital in Baucau. A doctor at the hospital immediately began to treat his wounds but troops arrived at the hospital at around 11 pm, demanding that Domínggus be handed over. The doctor argued with the soldiers, saying that Dominggus needed urgent treatment, but the soldiers said he was a guerrilla and must be handed over to the army. The doctor had no option but to hand him over. Outside the hospital at 11 pm, Dominggus was severely beaten and died on the spot.

The next day, the army informed the chief of the village where Dominggus lives that he had been killed during an attack launched against the army by the guerrillas. Later that day, the body of Dominggus was taken to the village and the village head was told to arrange for his burial, but he and the other villagers refused to do so, saying that they did not accept the account they had been given of his death. So the soldiers took the body away and buried it themselves. At 11 pm that night (6 October), a convoy of ten army vehicles drove into the village and rounded up the village head and all the inhabitants - men, women and children. They were all driven off to an unknown destination. Since then, some have returned to the village. The village head, members of Dominggus' family and some others have not yet returned home; their whereabouts are not known.



According to reports reaching Amnesty International, Indonesia has arrested hundreds of suspected supporters of independence for East Timor just ahead of the first anniversary of the Dili massacre. Torture and ill-treatment of political detainees is routine. Amnesty says the situation inside East Timor has deteriorated in the year since the massacre. The international human rights organisation has again been denied access to East Timor, and an Australian parliamentary delegation which was to have visited East Timor in late October had its permission withdrawn at the last minute.

On a more optimistic note, the Timorese have pinned their hopes on U.S. President-elect Bill Clinton who they say will press Jakarta for an independence referendum in the troubled territory. Jose Ramos Horta, international spokesperson for the East Timorese resistance, said indirect talks with aides to Clinton indicated he would press Jakarta for an act of self-determination as prescribed by United Nations resolutions. The United Nations does not recognise Jakarta's annexation of the territory. Horta believes the change in Washington's approach to relations with Jakarta will be evident by June next year.

At the international level, talks between Lisbon and Jakarta over East Timor are to start on December 17 under the auspices of U.N. Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. An "exploratory meeting" was held on sep. 27. Info: gn:tapol reg.easttimor